**EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**July 26, 2020**

We find ourselves in new territory these past weeks and also ventured forward even unto more unknowns, as we deal with COVID19. In some regards, we can only imagine what the early Christians and the post-resurrection Christian assemblies went through in the first centuries of their faithful journey. They were trying to follow Christ and His directives toward loving one another and keeping the Christian faith, struggling through adverse and even hostile situations. But in the midst of it all, they knew they had Christ and the Holy Spirit to get them through, and so do and will we.

Through these upcoming weeks when we are not able to gather in our beloved worship center, I will do my best to provide for you each week a worship flow you can do at home. You will need to have your favorite Bible handy and be ready to prayerfully set aside time to let the Holy Spirit fill you with grace from His Word and peace from the prayers. **(If you have access to ZOOM, we are doing our Sunday Services using that tool live at our 9:30 am worship time. We have started having in Sanctuary Worship, following appropriate precautions on Sunday morning, as well. Love to see you at worship, either way.)**

**Let us begin, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!**

**Let us pray:**

**Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.**

**Amen.**

**Gathering Hymn**: **“Praise and Thanksgiving”** (ELW 689 (LBW 409))

In the midst of our praise and thanksgiving we hear in this hymn the total involvement of God in our world. We acknowledge, rejoice and constantly sense the presence of God’s gracious blessing in our lives. We need to keep our prayers and faith strong in these words. The last part of the fourth stanza is so encouraging and true, “...Where you [God] are reigning, no one will hunger, your love sustaining showers the land.”

If we can hold firm in this faith statement, then the earlier parts of the hymn flow freely in our Christian activity and beliefs. We will be able to learn God’s ways. We will be able to share with one another, not only what we have been blessed, but share how appreciative of that blessing and let people see it available through our charity and kindness done in Christ’s name.

(Sing or say it through as many times as you wish, letting the words fill your hearts)

Now, let us hear and draw near to us the Word of God as preserved for us through our Holy Scriptures. Get you Bible ready and your thoughts prepared to allow God to enter into your souls.

**First Reading: I Kings 3:5-12** (Read it to yourself or out loud, a couple times)

The preceding verse three gives us a foundational look at the faith commitment of Solomon which led to the dream and the blessing which came to him by Yahweh (God). “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at high places.” (v. 3) Even as a king at this point in his life he showed to Yahweh humbleness and piety. This pleased Yahweh as we can see in the verses, we have this morning through the dream Solomon had.

“Sundays and Seasons, Year A, 2017,” page 230, summarizes this section as such, “Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well. In verse 13[not read this morning] God gives him additional honor and riches beyond compare.”

A couple of points on the text. We are not sure why Solomon mentioned going to Gibeon (“the great high place” located there is about 6 mi. NW of Jerusalem). The “dream” is a reference to as one of the times (ways) when a person received a divine revelation from God. And in verse nine we have Solomon requesting that Yahweh would give His servant (Solomon) an “understanding mind” to rule over his people.

In the sense used by Solomon of an “understanding mind” literally meant “a hearing heart.” Is not that an interesting way to listen to our Lord in our daily lives? The Hebrew word “to hear” frequently means “to hearken, to obey” (look at 1 Samuel 15.22). The Lutheran Study Bible explains Solomon’s leadership request, “To act in obedience to God, Solomon wanted to be able to “discern between good and evil.” (Page 536) Solomon wanted said heart which would listen to what Yahweh had to say to him for making just and true decisions. He knew he would have to conform to Yahweh’s desires and not merely his own, if he was to forthrightly care for Yahweh’s people.

Solomon realized his own human limitations and sought Yahweh’s wisdom. It should be the same consideration we should follow in our daily dealings.

**Psalm 119:129-136 (**read it to yourself or out loud)

This Psalm really fits nicely with Solomon’s request in the first lesson to receive from God an “understanding mind” (I Kgs 3:9). Even more so the literal phrase, “a hearing heart” which desires to hear God’s wonderful testimonies. Psalm 119:130 reveals the Psalmist’s wish to be lifted from a heart that only hears what he understands as a mortal to one that is enlightened by a heart that listens to God. “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.” This “understanding of your words” reflects the significance of God’s word is an entrance to a divine wisdom for the believer.

As believers we do not want the iniquity of the world (v. 133) to cloud our wish to know God in the fullest. If we are redeemed by His love and care, His face will shine on us and living in His wishes will become easier. As we live in God, the path to His righteousness becomes clearer. We are thankful for our true relationship with Him and tears flow down our cheeks for those who live distant from God’s ways.

**Second Lesson: Romans 8:26-39 (**Read it to yourself or out loud, a couple times)

There is a nice movement of faith revelation in these verses. “Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.” (v. 26) And “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (v.31) And also, “[nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (v. 39b) In a way it is the full viewing of God’s active role in bringing forth our salvation and His power to see it through unto eternity.

God has so loved us He sent His Son into the world to die for our sins and raise us up above the fear of death. Jesus Christ’s victory on the cross and through the His Resurrection depicts His Father’s active presence for our salvation and redemption. And there is no earthly power which has any true ability to separate us from His loving involvement. And His involvement continues on in a post-resurrection era through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reads the hearts of all people and works to provide the saving possibility for all whom are faithful to the Word of God.

The Word of God is revelation and promise. The ministry and salvation action of Jesus Christ on the Cross and the subsequent resurrection put the Word of God’s love and grace visible. The Holy Spirit’s work takes what we can know by God’s saving power active today in the confidence the Word of God providence.

**Gospel Acclamation s 205**

**Gospel: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52** (Read it to yourself or out loud, a couple times)

It is common in the Gospel of Matthew for Jesus Christ and his disciple’s proclamation that people should take heart in the good news that the Kingdom of heaven is near. In our gospel today we have Jesus’ using parables to try to encourage those hearing these words.

The Lutheran Study Bible frames these parables as such, “These two parables [“The Mustard Seed” and “Leaven”] contrast the small beginnings of the kingdom of heaven with its exceptional, though hidden, growth. God is active in small things, even though His presence may not be evident. Jesus’ ministry had humble beginnings, but its expansion has been miraculous. God uses even our small efforts to accomplish His purposes.” (Page 1608)

The mustard seed grows to become a tree of life for bird nesting (and I will add shade). The little amount of leaven, causes the whole loaf to rise. These parables envision for us the ability of God to take what seems to be of such a little bit to become a large amount. God wants us to have faith in His promise to cause great things to happen even if it seems impossible. Even our own faith starts out as a spark and God through our faith will make it a roaring fire of belief in His saving grace beyond all things.

The other parables in this gospel text for today also reflect the wonder of how great it is to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. The ultimate issue is put forth by Christ that there is no earthly possession which is greater the true value of being at one with God, in His Kingdom. And we have nothing to fear because we are part of the Kingdom by our faith and Christ’s promise to be for us always.

**Hymn of the Day: “We Come to the Hungry Feast”** (ELW 479)

This hymn reinforces Christ’s desire to make salvation available to all people. Those who hunger for the divine presence in their lives will find in Christ’s love and mercy, a feast. The hymn is an invitation drawing all people to feel help and assistance to Christ. Christ lets no one go hungry in life and faith. He endows upon all who call out to Him and allow His Spirit to fill their hearts with His love, and a sense of peace.

(Sing or recite out loud this hymn, contemplating its peaceful grace.)

**Apostles' Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,**

**creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic church,**

**the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,**

**and the life everlasting.**

**Amen.**

**Prayers of Intercession**

**The Lord’s Prayer (Traditional)**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come, thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power,**

**and the glory, forever and ever. Amen**

Benediction: May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.